

THEORY OF REPRESENTATION.

The following is an Extract from the Speech of JOHN QUINCY ADAMS on an amendment made to the Apportionment Bill of the House by the Senate, by which the ratio of representation should be raised so as to diminish the number of members in the House of Representatives. The opinions presented are of high value from their general bearings upon the Theory of our Government:

The bill as amended by the Senate gave 223 members, and was a diminution of this House as it now existed. In Roman history, where there had been any great mutiny or rebellion in the army against the commanding general, he had the power of performing that operation, of decimating the army; that was, of authorizing every tenth man to put one man to death. Mr. A. could not conceive of any thing more perfectly analogous to this than this attempt on the part of the Senate to decimate this House as it now existed. Instead of following the course which God and nature had given, of increasing the representation of this House, the Senate had determined to arrest the course of nature, and as the population increased to diminish their representation. They had now a House of 242 members; the Senate proposed to reduce that number. These 242 members were fixed at a time when the population of this country was about 12,000,000; and now, with an increase of 50 per cent., with a population of 15,000,000, the people were to be deprived of one-tenth part of the representation which was not thought too much for 12,000,000. He did not profess to be one of the pure "Democracy" of this country in the sense in which that word was understood in a party point of view; but he professed to be a Democrat to the utmost extent, so far as related to the composition of this House. This House was the democratic branch and department of the Government of the United States. It represented the people, and that there should be a proportion, so far as practicable, between the number of the people and the number of their representatives on this floor, appeared to him to be a first principle in our Government which never ought to be violated. He never would violate it until the representation should come to what it might in the course of a century—until it should be so numerous that the same objection which made it necessary that there should be a representation of the people would apply to these representatives of the people themselves. This was the only objection which, it appeared to him, ought to be considered in settling this point.

What was true democracy? The theory of Nature, that existed in nature and in the world. It was that Government, so far as the people could be convened, should be a Government of the people themselves; and every thing in the nature of representation was only a necessary departure from this, in consequence of the number growing so large that the people cannot assemble to consult on measures of legislation. Representation, therefore, was a necessary expedient, substituted for the action of the people themselves. So long as the assembly was not so numerous as that it became impracticable for them to act, so long the greater the number of representation was, the nearer it approached to the democracy of the people. This was self-evident, and it was the principle on which the Constitution of the United States was framed.

He was old enough to remember the time when this Constitution was framed—when it was discussed and debated by the people in all the States; and well did he remember that one of the strongest objections made against it in every part of the Union was, that representation was not and could not be sufficiently numerous. There was, therefore, a very great question in the early periods of the organization of Government—what the number of constituents should be for every Representative? It was delayed a long time what should be the minimum, and it was a great question whether it should even be 30,000—whether that was not too numerous a constituency. Many of his opinions on the subject of the Constitution were formed in the course of these debates, which he had followed with intense interest from the time when the Convention at Philadelphia issued forth the Constitution till it was finally adopted, and until the first representation under the first census was made.

Having formed these opinions at that time, and having considered that, in the organization of this Government, this House was emphatically (and he perhaps might add exclusively) the concentration of the democratic power of the people of the United States in their organized form of Government, he had always adhered, from that time to this, to the principle that the representation in this House ought to be as numerous, in proportion to the body of the constituency, as practicable to meet together, and that, as the population increased, the representation should increase accordingly. That was the principle on which he had voted for the ratio of 50,179 adopted by the House, and under which he had determined not to vote for any proportion of representation under 50,000 or above 60,000; and when a friend of his—a most excellent theoretical man, and a most excellent practical man, excepting that his theories and practice did not always agree—had moved a large representation, he had been exceedingly delighted at his proposition finding but little favor in this House. Among the many numbers voted on after another, on the large numbers there was a large majority of this House against them, and he hoped this House would adhere to the opinion on which they rejected so decisively any of the large numbers exceeding 60,000. He had been willing to take the number the majority of the House concurred in, between 60,000 and 50,000. If the Senate should choose to lose this bill and twenty others on the subject, never should his vote go for the number the Senate had now chosen.

When he spoke of Democracy he hoped the House would understand him. He was not a Democrat of the "Five Points." [Laughter.] That was a party Democracy to which he never had belonged; but for representation in this House he believed he was as Democratic as any member in this House. It was the representation of the people of the United States that was here concentrated. If they went into another branch of this department they found no Democracy; there was none in it by the Constitution. What was the representation of that House? It was the representation of corporations. That body (and he did not intend to displease it) was essentially and inherently Aristocratic. It was the Aristocratic branch of this Government. Was not that evident? Had not Delaware, (to which he was now so desirous of doing full justice by giving her an additional member,) had she not been told that it was her vote in that House which was to be her compensation for not having a fair proportion here? Delaware there, with her two votes, had precisely the same power as the great State of New-York had, with her forty votes, on this floor. The gentleman from Delaware (Mr. RODNEY) represented a population of nearly 30,000; the two Senators from New-York represented a population of about 2,500,000—thirty times that amount. He thought that the framers of the Constitution, in assuming the State Legislatures of this Union as the constituents of that body, did perfectly well; but it was not democratic, assuredly; it was the accommodation of the aristocratic principle to the composition of the people of the United States, and there were concentrated the corporation principle, the independent sovereign principle, the State rights principle, (for which he had the highest respect, representing as he did, in part, one of those sovereign States in this House,) but he hoped it would not be willing and wantonly brought into collision with the power of the people in this House.

Let that body perform its proper functions; let it be a chain in the organization of the laws of the Union; let it maintain the States' rights to the fullest extent; but let it not undertake to tell this House how the people of the United States should be represented here. That was a true commitment to this House by the People, and, if it was not made an exception by the Constitution of the United States to the powers the Senate had of amending the acts going from his House, in his opinion the House ought to

maintain it *de facto*, and never allow the Senate to dictate to this House what the representation of the people should be here.

He had attended as much as he could to the course of the arguments used in the Senate in order to carry this amendment. He did not know but that it might be out of order to refer to it here; but one of the main points on which the amendment was carried in the Senate was the argument that this House should be too numerous it would become too powerful for them, and would overbalance the power of the Senate. What was the meaning of that? The Senate chose to restrict the power of the United States in choosing their Representatives for fear the representatives of the people would be too much and too powerful for that body, and thus the interest of the Senate was to be made the test and principle on which the power of the Senate. What was the meaning of that? The Senate chose to restrict the power of the United States in choosing their Representatives for fear the representatives of the people would be too much and too powerful for that body, and thus the interest of the Senate was to be made the test and principle on which the power of the Senate. What was the meaning of that?

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